

REVIEWS

Tēmōnit. The Jewish Varieties of Yemeni Arabic. By ORI SHACHMON. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2022. 250 p. ISBN 978-3-447-11912-2.

The book is an extensive documentation of Yemeni Jewish dialects, the result of approximately twenty-five years of fieldwork conducted in Israel with Yemeni immigrants. Prior to Shachmon's work, only a few Yemeni dialects, mostly that of the capital, Ṣan'ā', had been studied thoroughly. Her research offers insight into some Yemeni dialects that had never previously been described.

The book is divided into two main parts: the first part provides historical and geographic context, and a general overview of the most significant features of these dialects; the second part, which is the lion's share of the book, consists of forty specimen texts.

In the first part, the reader is given an interesting insight into the 20th-century history of the Jews in Yemen. During the second half of the century, the majority of Jews left Yemen, primarily for Israel. Today, there are practically no Jews left in the country. Due to their integration into Israeli society, the Jewish varieties of Yemeni Arabic are on the verge of extinction, making this documentation especially valuable. Shachmon then describes her methodology: the primary goal was to conduct open-ended interviews, in which the informants were encouraged to tell stories of their own choice. In a few cases, she used targeted elicitation, though this was only possible with a few informants.

After these introductory sections, Shachmon turns to a general linguistic description of the dialects. She first notes that they share many features with the Muslim varieties spoken in the given region. However, linguistic differences did exist, most notably in the cities, where Jewish-Muslim coexistence was marked by less cohesion. The differences are divided into two categories: the first involves the use of Hebrew and Aramaic elements. The second category of differences is found in the Arabic layer of a given variety: in these cases, the Arabic used by Yemeni Jews can be traced back to another Arabic dialect, a phenomenon known as "migrated dialectism", which has been observed in other Jewish languages as well. Another distinction within the Arabic layer lies in the frequency of the use of certain forms: for example, when the Muslim variety has two alternative patterns, the Jewish variety may use only one of them exclusively, even if that form is rarely used by Muslims. Shachmon then describes many interesting features of these varieties. Among these are gender-specific language use (as is well-known in other Arabic dialects); the preservation of diphthongs (*bayt*, *yawm*) in certain parts of Yemen; the

way *begadkefat* is used in these dialects (spirantization occurs in positions when it is not called for, or it does not occur when it would be called for); or the way stress patterns differ from most Arabic dialects. She also describes the secret language used by Jews in situations where they did not want Muslims to understand them, by using Hebrew and Aramaic words. Here, I would like to highlight one of her examples: “In cases where the Hebrew form sounds similar to its Arabic equivalent, an alternative Hebrew word may be chosen. This is presumably why the secret nickname for a Jew is not Hebrew יהודי *yahūdī* ‘Jew’, which is nearly identical to local Arabic *yihūdī/yahūdī*, but rather עברי *‘ibrī* ‘Israelite’.” (p. 21). This particular example is not convincing, since the word *‘ibrī* exists in Arabic as well, in the same sense. Of course, it would be possible that it is not used by Yemeni Arabs, but it is attested in Deboo’s Yemeni Arabic dictionary, also indicating ‘Jew’ (although apparently observed only in Ṣan‘ā’).¹ Shachmon does not seem entirely confident about this example either, as she begins by saying “presumably”.

At the end of the first part of the book, Shachmon provides the reader with verbal paradigms; tables of pronouns and suffixed pronouns; a description of the nominal feminine ending, gender neutral participles and adjectives; and some curious grammatical phenomena, for example, the use of *ḥaqq/ḥagg* to denote a fronted genitive exponent, among others.

The second part contains the specimen texts, stories told by Yemeni Jews now residing in Israel. The forty texts are drawn from a much larger archive of recordings and are divided into five sections based on geography: Central, Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Aden. Each section is preceded by general information on the respective community, as well as the informants, and some further description of the given dialect. For example, this is where it is noted that in Giblih, the definite article is assimilated to any following consonant, such as *ab-bēt* “the house”. Earlier in the book, she explains that Yemeni Jews settled in Israel in a dispersed way, which probably contributed to their rapid adoption of Israeli Hebrew, as they were no longer in their familiar environment. At the same time, “it has also increased the possibility of contact with, and influence by, other Yemeni dialects as well as Palestinian Arabic.” (p. 11). However, this does not seem to be taken into consideration when describing the linguistic nature of the specimen texts (except for text 32).

The recordings are transcribed exactly as they were spoken by the informants, reflecting everyday speech patterns: the sentences are often anacoluthic, and they frequently feature repetitions and mid-sentence restructuring. We are introduced to a variety of topics related to daily life, such as food preparation and the community’s relationship with Muslims (where we read both positive and negative accounts). However, the most recurring themes are child marriages, child mortality, and the

¹ Deboo, Jeffrey. 1989. *Jemenitisches Wörterbuch – Arabisch-Deutsch-Englisch*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

community's fear of a Jewish girl's conversion to Islam. One noteworthy story involves an alleged encounter with a demon.

As already mentioned, since the majority of Yemeni Jews immigrated to Israel and quickly adopted Israeli Hebrew, they are gradually losing their mother tongue. Shachmon notes that most second-generation immigrants from Yemen cannot speak their parents' language at all. Thus, this work is an invaluable source for preserving the Jewish dialects of Yemeni Arabic before they disappear entirely in the near future.

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Arabische Kerzendichtung des 10.–15. Jahrhunderts. Eine Studie zur arabischen ekphrastischen Poesie. (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 131).

By WERNER DIEM. Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2023. 300 p. ISSN 0567-4980. ISBN 978-3-447-12013-5.

In Classical Arabic poetry, description (*waṣf*) plays a significant role. Within poetical description, early literary theorists distinguished different themes (*ma'nā*; pl. *ma'ānī*). One must refer to Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) monumental 1,500-page work, *Kitāb al-ma'ānī al-kabīr fī abyāt al-ma'ānī*. Later, some themes—mainly, but not exclusively, objects—became the focus of short poems. Werner Diem's excellent study deals with such a type: the poem describing the candle (*šam'a*). Diem uses the Greek literary term ekphrastic for works describing special objects and calls them ekphrastic ('descriptive') poems, although in contemporary literary criticism this term usually refers to a vivid verbal description of an object depicted in a visual work of art, such as a painting or sculpture, within a literary work, often a poem.

The dates in the volume may cause slight confusion. The title page gives the dates in the Common Era (poems between the tenth and fifteenth centuries), whereas inside the book the author uses only Hijri dates for the notation of poets' death years. Furthermore, none of the poets included lived into the fifteenth century CE: the last poet, Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī, died in 750 AH/1349 CE, i.e., in the mid-fourteenth century. It would have been more helpful to supply CE dates consistently as well.

After a detailed introduction discussing universal characteristics of the poems quoted, the book comprises ten chapters. The Introduction analyses the poems from a stylistic standpoint, emphasizing the significance of the candle and oil lamp in everyday life. These poems, like most Arabic verse, employ simile, metaphor, and personification. Personification is particularly abundant: the candle "sleeps" when unlit; its flame "struggles" against the darkness. Another characteristic is that the poems describe a generic candle rather than a particular specimen. Diem likens these poems to watercolour paintings that suggest expressive portraits with a few brushstrokes.